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The Old Yugoslavia: Continuing to Crumble

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"In Montenegro live only true and pure Serbs who speak Serbian"

- 3rd Grade geography textbook, Kingdom of Montenegro, 1911

As the US, NATO, and the rest of the international community provide increasing attention and resources to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the War on Terrorism, they are overlooking another crisis brewing in the Balkans: the break-up of the Union of Serbia-Montenegro (Serbia-Montenegro). This could re-ignite regional separatist movements requiring an increased presence from the US, which is preparing to withdraw from the Balkans because of political-military commitments elsewhere.^[1]

During his visit to the United States in July, the new Serbian President, Boris Tadic, surprised both supporters and opponents of Montenegrin independence by telling CNN that Montenegro would hold an independence referendum as early as 2005.^[2] In early September, the European Union (EU) stated Serbia and Montenegro could each pursue separate tracks for EU membership, a move that Montenegro perceives as one step closer to internationally-accepted independence. Unless the international community redefines its longstanding Balkans policy of multi-ethnic pluralism and border inviolability, Montenegro's potential secession will exacerbate Kosovo's final status controversy, fuel separatist aspirations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, complicate ethnic stability in Macedonia and encourage secession in regions beyond the Balkans.

Background

Many of today's Balkan states were part of Josip Tito's post-World War II Yugoslavia. This was a communist federation comprised by Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, and Serbia's two autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina.^[3] Following Tito's death in 1980, the end of the Cold War, and the subsequent fall of communism in eastern Europe, Yugoslavia began to unravel along ethnic lines. In 1989, President Slobodan Milosevic withdrew Kosovo's and Vojvodina's status as autonomous provinces, constitutionally re-integrating them back into Serbia.^[4] In 1992, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina each declared independence and were recognized as independent states by the international community. That same year, Serbia and Montenegro declared a new "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" (FRY) and, under Milosevic, Serbia unsuccessfully attempted to unite ethnic Serbs in neighboring republics into a "Greater Serbia." This led to full-scale war -- largely between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) in Bosnia-Herzegovina -- which ended in 1995 following heavy NATO intervention and an uneasy truce articulated in the Dayton Accords.^[5]

Bosnia-Herzegovina was subsequently organized into two constituent entities including the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS) and the Croat-Bosniak-dominated Federation. Both fell under Bosnia-Herzegovina's national government. The internationally staffed Office of High Representative (OHR) was established to develop the country into a viable, democratic state and continues to exercise authority over all levels of Bosnia-Herzegovina's governments.

By 1999, growing ethnic tensions in Kosovo prompted ethnic Albanians to form the Kosovo Liberation Army to combat Serb authority and oppression. Milosevic responded by using FRY military forces and Serb paramilitaries to kill or expel vast numbers of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. This triggered an international response including a NATO bombing campaign which drove Serbian forces out of the former province. The UN sanctioned the establishment of Kosovo as an international protectorate enforced by NATO and other peacekeeping troops still operating there. In 2000, Milosevic and his government were ousted by a reformist movement led by Vojislav Kostunica, who became the FRY's new president. In 2002, the EU brokered an agreement whereby the Serbian and Montenegrin components of the FRY would forge a looser relationship. These talks became reality the next year when lawmakers restructured the country into a loose federation of two republics, called Serbia-Montenegro.^[6]

Multi-ethnic Pluralism – the Answer to the Balkans?

The international community's enforcement of multi-ethnic pluralism in the Balkans has stemmed from several key issues. First, it was obvious from the 1992-1995 war itself, coupled with the region's volatile history of repeated ethnic wars and migrations, that the Balkan states were far too fragile and potentially explosive for the international community to apply a policy of self-determinism that facilitated the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe.^[7] Having finally stabilized the region's security environment in 1995, the US, EU, and UN perceived that any acceptance on their part to consider secessionist initiatives or border changes -- beyond the agreements outlined in the Dayton Accords -- would risk a re-escalation of ethnic hostilities and a "domino effect" of breakaway Balkan territories seeking international recognition. Instead, they stood firm on a policy of multi-ethnic pluralism and border inviolability, enforcing it with NATO-led forces on the ground and an effective OHR to steer Bosnia-Herzegovina's multi-ethnic leadership down a democratic path.

Second, from a politically and economically analytical perspective, it was evident that many of the Balkans' post-communist governments had failed to capitalize on the opportunity to transform their ossified economies and to institutionalize democratic pluralism. Moreover, it was clear that there was an absence of an alternative elite that could sow the seeds of a civil pluralistic society. Comparatively, Central European countries including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Baltic states -- which had displayed a greater success in dismantling the old political structures and building pluralistic democracies -- possessed an organized and broad-based alternative elite which promoted a civic society capable of marginalizing the influence of nationalist extremist groups.^[8] The Balkans region lacked these attributes and remained vulnerable to ethno-nationalist movements capable of repeating the 1992-1995 war, a condition which further justified the international community's commitment to enforcing the region's existing borders around a multi-ethnic society.

Third, Balkans violence in the first half of the 1990s stunned the rest of Europe, which was attempting to advance political and economic integration throughout the continent. Consequently, Europe's response was to isolate the region, preventing its unrest from further disrupting constructive international developments elsewhere.^[9] Kosovo's and Macedonia's ethnic conflicts in 1999 and 2001, respectively, demonstrated the Balkans' continued vulnerability to ethnic conflict and reinforced the international community's commitment to maintaining the region's existing borders.

Recent developments in Belgrade, however, have foreshadowed a need to tailor or refine the international community's policy. Milosevic's replacement in 2000 by a reformist coalition -- albeit a coalition often weakened by its own political rifts and threatened by the ultranationalist "old guard" -- has marked the beginning of what may be a slowly developing political elite in Serbia, with democratic pluralism and European integration at the top of its priorities. With its sites on improving its well-being through a growing Euro-Atlantic relationship, Serbia may be maturing to the point that it is willing to accept the further breakup of rump Yugoslavia; i.e., to peacefully let go of Montenegro, which has consistently pushed for independence. This possibility suggests the international community needs to redefine its Balkans policy, holistically, so that it

addresses this development as well as less stable parts of the Balkans where ethnic conflict is only marginally kept at bay.

From the FRY to Serbia-Montenegro

Since his 1998 election, Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic has gradually moved the republic away from Belgrade's influence and openly campaigned for the republic's secession from the FRY. This nearly prompted former FRY President Slobodan Milosevic to crack down militarily on Montenegro shortly before his October 2000 fall from power. While the FRY's subsequent reformist government -- led by Vojislav Kostunica and the Democratic Opposition of Serbia -- significantly improved Belgrade-Podgorica relations, Djukanovic continued to pursue Montenegrin independence, though less aggressively. In February 2001, in one of its first legislative steps toward a vote on independence, Montenegro passed the "Law on Referendum." This stipulated that a successful referendum required a majority from a turnout of more than half of all eligible voters.^[10] The law provides the tool by which Montenegro will vote to leave or remain in its union with Serbia.

Concerned over the regional consequences of a unilateral independence move by Montenegro, the European Union brokered the 14 March 2002 Belgrade Agreement. This was signed by the heads of the FRY's federal and republican governments and redefined Montenegro's relationship with Serbia in a joint system. The agreement called for the creation of a new state that would essentially reverse the FRY's centralized power structure; i.e., most of the power would reside with each constituent republic rather than at the national level, where only a few ministerial positions would be shared: Foreign Affairs, Defense, Internal Economics, External Economics, and Human Rights. Moreover, the agreement included an exit clause for Montenegro, specifically stating, "After a period of three years, the member-states have the right to initiate a procedure to change the statehood status or to leave the union of states."^[11] On 4 February 2003, the FRY Parliament ratified a Constitutional Charter consistent with the agreement's concept, establishing a new state union and changing the name of the country to Serbia-Montenegro.

While the international community and most of Belgrade's leadership viewed the agreement as a means by which Serbia-Montenegro could politically stabilize and seek eventual EU membership, Djukanovic and his pro-independence supporters viewed it as a unique venue through which Montenegro could gain independence with international acceptance. As a result of their divergent perspectives on this matter, Serbia and Montenegro have accomplished little in republic-level constitutional and economic harmonization that the Belgrade Agreement calls for and which are key to Serbia-Montenegro's transition to a viable joint state capable of substantive Euro-Atlantic integration. Today, the country remains a weak confederation and parliamentary democracy, loosely joining Serbia and Montenegro into a union that faces dissolution within the next two years, and raises concern that neither state -- particularly Montenegro -- is economically prepared to become independent. Furthermore, if the two republics agree to dissolve the union, they will face a multitude of new and difficult arrangements including a restructuring or division of their common military, new border agreements, access to the Adriatic, and more.

Montenegro: Divided Loyalties and Ties

While Montenegro's population remains divided evenly among supporters and opponents of independence, Djukanovic's ruling coalition may have the wherewithal -- particularly against the republic's disorganized and fractured opposition -- to push through a successful independence referendum. According to a June poll conducted by the republic's Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDUM), 39% of Montenegro's populace supports independence while 39% oppose it. However, recent trends indicate growing support for independence among the increasingly popular "Group for Change," a non-governmental organization expected to transform itself into an independent political party. According to CEDUM, the "Group for Change" believes it could replace Djukanovic after the next parliamentary elections, and its support for the referendum will tip the scales in favor of independence.^[12]

The government. Djukanovic's ruling coalition contends that Serbia-Montenegro's union is a dysfunctional obstacle to the constituent republics' European integration. Further, it contends that the agreement should be reviewed as to whether it is necessary to wait the full three years before either republic holds an independence referendum. It also interprets the Belgrade Agreement's three-year moratorium to begin from the date the agreement was signed rather than the date upon which the new Constitutional Charter was ratified, suggesting Montenegro could hold an independence referendum as early as 2005 instead of 2006. The coalition undoubtedly hopes that a near-term, successful referendum will nullify the need to hold Serbia-Montenegro's February 2005 parliamentary elections or pursue further EU-mandated requirements under the Belgrade Agreement.

In mid-July, Djukanovic stated publicly that Montenegro was not giving up on its right to an independence referendum, and that he had "tied his career with the project of Montenegro's independence," which he believed is closely related to the "preservation of Montenegro's national, state, and cultural identity."^[13] Moreover, Djukanovic and his ruling party facilitated parliament's approval to designate 13 July as Montenegro's Statehood Day, since that is the date in 1878 on which the international community officially recognized Montenegro as a sovereign nation. The parliament also adopted a new national anthem and flag used during Montenegro's pre-1918 independence period. These moves reflect the momentum and resolve with which Montenegro's ruling coalition is pursuing secession from its union with Serbia.^[14]

The opposition. Over the past year, Montenegro's opposition parties have been too divided and disorganized to substantively represent the republic's anti-independence bloc. Led by the Socialist People's Party leader Predrag Bulatovic -- once allied to former FRY President Slobodan Milosevic -- the opposition has disagreed with several of Podgorica's policies by boycotting parliament for over a year and conducting weekly protests this summer. This has not boosted the opposition's support within the populace. Most of the opposition believes Montenegro should remain officially joined to Serbia because of historic and religious ties, arguing that Serbia-Montenegro's union is the best guarantee for Montenegro's economic survival and development. However, one of the opposition's five key parties -- the Liberal Alliance -- actually supports Montenegrin independence, further fracturing the opposition's unity and influence on Montenegro's future.^[15]

Minorities. Montenegro's key minorities -- ethnic Albanians (7 percent) in the south and Muslims (14 percent) in the north often hold the balance of power in the republic.^[16] Ethnic Albanians in Montenegro largely support Montenegrin independence, as they regard Djukanovic as an ally in a largely Slav and hostile region. On the other hand, Montenegro's Muslims (16 percent of the population) object to independence, fearful of being disconnected from their co-religionist kin in the Sandzak region to the north.^[17]

History of independence. The uniquely rugged and mountainous Montenegrin territory enjoyed independence in the 11 century before becoming part of an expanding Serbia, regained significant autonomy in the 16th century under the Venetians and Turks, and gained full independence in the 18th century. Montenegro's independence was internationally recognized at the 1878 Congress of Berlin. After World War I, Montenegro's Great Assembly voted to annex its territory to Serbia. The populace is fiercely proud of its record on the battlefield and the fact that it has spent a much longer period fighting for and securing its freedom than has any other South Slav nation.^[18]

Serbs and Montenegrins share a Slav heritage, speak the same language, largely practice the same religion, but have different historical experiences and have developed different identities. Montenegrins are split between those who believe they are Serbs but living in a different state and those who claim they are a different nation altogether.^[19] The reasons Montenegrins support or oppose independence, however, depend on more than the extent to which they identify with the republic's history as separate from Serbia's. As Christopher Bennett states in his *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, the precise nature of the Serb-Montenegrin relationship depends not on historical and cultural ties but on whether it is mutually advantageous.^[20] Many Montenegrins perceive -- particularly those in the north who still have strong affiliations in Serbia proper -- that an independent

Montenegro will isolate them economically, politically, and internationally. Others, like Djukanovic and his supporters, believe they have more to gain by removing the republic from its union with Serbia.

Economic Infrastructure. To economically withstand a transition to independence and satisfy the EU's requirements for eventual accession, Montenegro will likely have to pursue some of the same economic ties with Serbia already recommended by the EU for a successful joint state. Key components of Montenegro's economic infrastructure remain oriented toward Serbia, and existing lines of communication and trade leading into Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina -- possibly capable of facilitating increased trade with the West -- would need further development before Montenegro could cast off its economic relationship with Serbia.

Montenegro has made a reasonable start toward economic independence on several fronts, to include maintaining its own central bank, using the euro instead of the Yugoslav dinar as official currency, collecting its own customs tariffs, establishing its own telecommunications industry, and managing its own budget.^[21] Montenegro is also attempting to capitalize on trade through its main port at Bar, its two main airports at Podgorica and Tivat, and it aims to boost tourism, currently its primary industry. However, because Montenegro had always been integrated into the former FRY energy system, it remains, to some extent, dependent on Serbia for its oil and electricity. It has no indigenous source of oil or gas, no oil refining capability, and no pipeline network. While it can import some oil through Bar, its total import requirements rely in part on roads and rail lines from Serbia. Though Montenegro generates internal electricity from one thermo-electric and two hydro-electric plants,^[22] it must import one third of its electric power, and continually suffers from an energy deficit.^[23] Montenegro's road system includes one main highway each into Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Albania, but its primary trading route leads into Serbia. Moreover, Montenegro's limited rail system includes no links westward to Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina; the main rail from Bar leads to Serbia, while a secondary one leads to Albania and the remaining ones are internal. These infrastructural limitations -- particularly to the west -- suggest that Montenegro would be only politically independent from Serbia following a successful referendum, but its economic independence would come only gradually, requiring further infrastructural development and heavy foreign investment.

Serbia: Viable Future With or Without Montenegro

Since Milosevic's fall in 2000, Serbia's leadership has advocated retaining Montenegro in rump-Yugoslavia, but will not prevent Montenegrin independence. Though their specific agendas vary, the general objective among most of Belgrade's reformist leaders is to guide Serbia into EU and NATO membership, even if it means accomplishing this without Montenegro.

Within Serbia's ruling coalition, Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia are the strongest proponents of retaining Montenegro. They are the most conservative party and were highly engaged in establishing the Serbia-Montenegro union from the outset. In his 21 July 2004 meeting with senior Council of Europe representative Bernard Bot, Kostunica highlighted the Serbian government's strong commitment to integration into the European Union. He stated this is also the priority of Serbia-Montenegro, and claimed that the "establishment of the state union has put an end to the...disintegration in the region."^[24]

Alternatively, Serbia's less conservative reformist leaders believe that Montenegrin independence is a foregone conclusion, that EU requirements for a joint state are too cumbersome and expensive, and that Serbia should attempt to seek EU and other Euro-Atlantic affiliations on its own. In early July, the economic-oriented G17 Plus party -- whose leader Miroljub Labus is Serbia's deputy prime minister -- stated that the current state union is nonfunctional, and that it would benefit Serbia to sever ties with Montenegro, discontinuing the financially expensive and unnecessary effort of keeping the two republics joined. The party claimed it cost Serbia 1.4 billion euros per year, with no economic gains, to keep Serbia-Montenegro together.^[25] On 20 July 2004, Serb President Tadic (Democratic Party) emphasized publicly that he will respect Montenegrin citizens' will if they opt for independence, though he has suggested that further fragmentation of the state union would not necessarily be good in terms of regional security.^[26]

Serbia-Montenegro's government in Belgrade -- including the union's president and council of ministers -- do not have significant influence on the joint state's potential dissolution. First, Serbia-Montenegro President Svetozar Marovic is Montenegrin. Secondly, the make-up of the council of ministers reflects the constituency of the two member republics. Marovic will likely refrain from strongly advocating pro- or anti-Montenegrin independence, and simply promote an interpretation of the Belgrade Agreement that offends neither Montenegro nor the EU. Marovic articulated this position in his 4 July 2004 television interview, simply stating it was his duty "not to oppress this state union" and to "affirm its goals...written in the Constitutional Charter." Continuing to leave open the possibility of Montenegrin independence while supporting EU goals, he stated, "...it seems to me...we can utilize to our own ends the three years we have under the Belgrade Agreement and the Constitutional Charter and say: 'yes, three years ago, we were that far from "Europe, and now we are so much closer.'"^[27]

Belgrade's overarching willingness to accept an independent Montenegro -- and therefore an independent Serbia -- stems from an underlying confidence that Serbia has a strong foundation for an economically viable, sovereign state excluding Montenegro. While Montenegro's secession would leave Serbia landlocked and deprive it of its sole outlet to the Adriatic Sea, Serbia has the Danube River, a developed industrial capacity and the ability to exploit multiple sources of energy, raw materials, and production -- particularly the hydroelectric power of the Danube and other rivers. Serbia's workforce and land mass are much greater than Montenegro's, evident by Serbia's population of 7.5 million -- without Kosovo -- compared to Montenegro's 650,000, and its geographic area of 88,000 square kilometers compared to Montenegro's 14,000.^[28] Because, Montenegro's key industry is limited to maritime and tourism development, Belgrade expects that an independent Montenegro will seek an economic bond with Serbia which may facilitate the latter's access to the Adriatic. Belgrade may also respond to a Montenegrin split from the union by allowing dual citizenship for Montenegrins. This would prompt many northern Montenegrins who identify with Serbia to relocate into Serbia proper. Montenegro's already nonviable economy would suffer and Podgorica would need to negotiate economic agreements possibly prolonging its reliance on Serbia and allowing Serbia access to the Adriatic coast.

Negative consequences for Serbia if Montenegro withdraws. Regardless of Belgrade's current position on Montenegrin independence, Serbia clearly has to consider several destabilizing possibilities surrounding the dissolution of the Serbia-Montenegro union. Foremost is the possibility that Serbia's ultranationalist opposition -- led by Tomislav Nikolic's Serbian Radical Party -- will gain a stronger foothold in the republic's government before Montenegro holds its independence referendum. This would reverse any union or independence-related progress between Montenegro and Serbia's current government. As of late July, there were already hints in the local press that Serbia might hold parliamentary elections before the end of the year, possibly giving the republic's well-disciplined ultranationalist voters another good chance of gaining a majority in the National Assembly.^[29] Though Nikolic pledged, during his latest presidential campaign, to respect the results of Montenegro's independence referendum,^[30] Serbian ultranationalists normally advocate the retention of Yugoslavia's remaining lands under Belgrade's authority. This would reduce Belgrade-Podgorica cooperation and force Montenegro to accelerate its independence process under less amicable circumstances.

Kosovo. Montenegro's potential secession raises the primary Serbian concern of Kosovo. Already, some pro-independence Montenegrin politicians are advocating the complete breakdown of rump Yugoslavia into three independent republics of Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. Djukanovic appears open to recognizing Pristina as a government worthy of developing stronger diplomatic ties.^[31] Kosovar Albanians will compound the issue, asserting they have even stronger justification than Montenegro for breaking away from Serbia. They will likely claim that if the international community is willing to set a new precedent by accepting Montenegro's secession from ethnically-similar Serbia -- therefore breaking its traditional Balkans policy of multi-ethnic pluralism and border inviolability -- then Kosovo's mostly non-Slav ethnicity more than justifies its own secession from Serbia. Belgrade may also be concerned that international community acceptance of Montenegro's secession suggests it may be more willing to support Kosovo's independence, a move which Belgrade would perceive as a threat to its sovereignty and as a catalyst for political chaos within Serbia proper.

Vojvodina. To a lesser extent, Montenegro's secession could force Serbia to renegotiate the status of its only other province, Vojvodina. Whoever controls Vojvodina's resources and profits from its privatization is at the heart of the dispute over its autonomy. Like Kosovo, Vojvodina was became an autonomous province in 1974 until Milosevic stripped it of this status in 1989. Unlike Kosovo, Vojvodina does not have a majority non-Serbian population and it merely asks for increased autonomy rather than full independence.^[32] Vojvodina's drive for autonomy is supported by a considerable proportion of the Serbian population, many of whom have very old ties to the region and see it as part of Central Europe rather than Serbia.^[33] Vojvodina is highly industrialized – as it includes the country's two oil refineries – and is also at the crossroads of the most important north-to-south Balkan communications route and the Danube canal system. Those wanting more autonomy complain that Vojvodina provides forty percent of Serbian state revenues, but only gets five percent of the budget. In February 2002, the Serbian Assembly narrowly voted for an "omnibus law" allowing the Vojvodina Assembly to regain a measure of its former autonomy including greater control over the budget, privatization, health and social security, agriculture, media, use of languages, water resources management and tourism.^[34] Despite this measure, Vojvodina – particularly its parliament chairman, Nenad Canak – continues to call for greater autonomy, and would almost certainly use Montenegro's secession (especially if it is followed by any increase in Kosovo's autonomy) as a pretext for granting Vojvodina increased sovereignty within Serbia.

The EU: Independence Referendum a Last Resort

The EU -- which authored and brokered the 2002 Belgrade Agreement -- supports all efforts to continue the Serbia-Montenegrin union, and views the three year moratorium as a testing period after which a re-evaluation and adjustments can be made to improve the political and economic viability of the joint state. The EU will not easily accept Montenegro's call for an independence referendum in 2005, as it claims the three-year moratorium didn't technically start until the 4 February 2003 adoption of the joint state's constitutional charter (i.e., when Serbia-Montenegro was officially established as a new state). The EU argues that, prior to this date, there was not officially a new state to "test" and therefore the three-year moratorium – which was designed to test Serbia-Montenegro's viability – could not yet have begun. Moreover, it considers any independence referendum an option only if the joint state concept is a failure; i.e, it proves to be dysfunctional or an impractical approach to regional stability.^[35] Overall, the EU fears a split between Podgorica and Belgrade could ignite unrest among separatist movements in Balkan flashpoints such as Macedonia, where an ethnic-Albanian rebellion raged for seven months in 2001.^[36]

EU's persistence in advancing Serbia-Montenegro as one state. The EU initiated and facilitated Serbia-Montenegro's development as a joint state, in part, because it supports the international community policy of preventing the potentially destabilizing ramifications of redrawing the Balkans' international borders. It perceived that Serbia and Montenegro have a higher chance of achieving EU standards together than apart. Once the Serbia-Montenegro union was official in February 2003, the EU launched the country into its Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), the cornerstone of the EU's western Balkans policy and the long-term medium by which any Balkans state can eventually attain EU membership.^[37]

Though the EU remains committed to keeping Serbia and Montenegro as a joint state, both republics' slow and cumbersome progress toward the Belgrade Agreement's economic harmonization requirements prompted a policy change in early September 2004: the EU stated that each republic could pursue a separate accession track toward EU membership.^[38] Political wrangling and turnover in Serbia and Montenegro had repeatedly prevented them from meeting constitutional and economic harmonization deadlines. Moreover, Belgrade's failure to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia -- by turning over indicted war criminals --prompted the EU and other components of the international community to restrict their assistance to Belgrade. Before the change in policy, the EU had managed to take only a few steps toward a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with Serbia-Montenegro jointly, including the establishment of an Enhanced Permanent Dialogue in July 2003, the adoption of an Internal Market and Trade Action Plan in August 2003, and the commencement of an SAA Feasibility Report in September 2003 (which was subsequently postponed until Belgrade stabilizes politically). In an ideal scenario, the Feasibility Study would

be followed by SAA negotiations, after which the EU and Serbia-Montenegro would establish an official SAA.^[39] With separate accession tracks, the EU will need to decide the proper stage of this process with which each republic must begin. It will also have to deal with perceptions; i.e., while the EU and Serbia view the separate accession tracks as a means to boost the joint state's economic viability, Montenegro may view it as one step closer to internationally recognized independence.

From a broad perspective, the EU is responding to Serbia's volatile political environment by advancing the SAP when Serbia's democratic reformists appear to be pulling together but stalling it during Belgrade's seemingly cyclical periods of political uncertainty. In his 28 April 2004 speech to the German Bundestag, EU External Relations Commissioner Christopher Patten described Serbia-Montenegro's progress as a "tragic story," stating that Belgrade has made "hardly any progress towards Europe" since Milosevic's 2000 fall from power and that Serbia can "protect those indicted for mass murder...or it can join the European Union, but it can't do both."^[40] In response to limited democratic progress following Serbia's late June election of reformist Boris Tadic as president, European Union High Representative Javier Solana claimed on 1 July that the joint state was "showing great potential" and that "with responsible and courageous leaders it might easily excel on its way to Europe.";;Solana pointed out that the work on the feasibility study will continue when the member republics harmonize customs tariffs for 56 remaining products, when the country starts cooperating with the Hague tribunal, and when the "Serbia-Montenegro common state becomes functional in all aspects."^[41] Solana's statement -- given before the EU's decision to allow a dual track accession process -- will now apply to each republic individually.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Struggle with Unity if Montenegro Secedes

Since the March 2002 Belgrade Agreement, Bosnia-Herzegovina has failed to present a unified, solid position regarding Montenegro's potential secession from the Serbia-Montenegro union.^[42] This is almost certainly due to widely differing opinions among the largely hard-line Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Croats of Bosnia's Council of Ministers and rotating presidency. Montenegro's independence referendum will likely become an increasingly contentious topic in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its secession would almost certainly fuel separatist aspirations among Republika Srpska's (RS) and the Federation's more radical Serbs and Croats. Unless Bosnian Serbs and Croats perceive a continued, responsive international community commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovina following the EU's replacement of NATO's Stabilization Force -- scheduled for completion by early 2005 -- separatists may take more provocative measures to promote their cause, including demonstrations, protests, and increased press rhetoric.

The RS. Given recent tensions between the international community and the RS regarding the latter's failure to cooperate sufficiently with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and to support further integration with the Federation, the RS's political climate is ripe for exploiting Montenegro's separation from Serbia. Montenegro's independence referendum, if in early 2005, will follow a recent spike in RS Serb nationalist expression after Office of High Representative Paddy Ashdown's late June sacking of approximately 60 RS officials, including the interior minister and many others from the republic's ruling Serbian Democratic Party. The sackings were intended to crackdown on those assisting fugitive war criminals and who otherwise were responsible -- because of their corrupt activities -- for preventing Bosnia's invitation into the Partnership for Peace at NATO's June 2004 Istanbul summit.^[43]

Perceiving the RS was unfairly bearing the burden of Bosnia-Herzegovina's failure to integrate with Europe, one RS Serb association initiated five petitions. Together, the petitions called for a halt in the transfer of powers to Bosnia-Herzegovina's state-level government, a halt in RS participation at that level, Paddy Ashdown's dismissal, active RS and Serbia-Montenegro participation in the protection of RS interests, and a referendum on RS independence.^[44] While the petitions' support has faded and Serb nationalist rhetoric has subsided, the RS's commitment to building a multi-ethnic, pluralistic Bosnia-Herzegovina is fragile. Bosnian Serbs will argue that if Montenegro -- which is historically, culturally, and ethnically close to Serbia -- can break away from its national government, then the RS Serbs -- vastly different from the Bosniaks and Croats with

whom they are required to share national statehood – are justified in separating from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Coupled with a view that the international community will eventually support Kosovo sovereignty, Bosnian Serbs will see an independent Montenegro as a change in the international community's commitment to multi-ethnic pluralism and border inviolability, a perception that will encourage them to seek their own secession from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Extrapolating this concept, Banja Luka would then look increasingly to Belgrade for recognition and aid, placing Serbia in a dilemma economically, politically, and internationally.

Unlike Montenegro, the RS does not have distinct historical periods during which it enjoyed independent statehood. While Serbs in the RS share a common ethnicity with Serbia's Serbs, most of today's RS has belonged to the Bosnia-Herzegovina territory since the 17th century, and Bosnia-Herzegovina's eastern border – which marks the RS' east side – was confirmed through a series of 19th century international agreements.^[45] Though Bosnia-Herzegovina attained republic status within Yugoslavia in 1946^[46], the development of a largely Serb administrative unit within Bosnia-Herzegovina did not emerge until 1989, when Radovan Karadzic's Serb Democratic Party began establishing two Serb *Krajinas*, or border regions, in Serb-dominated areas. By 1991, six *Krajina*'s had been established across Bosnia-Herzegovina in all areas Serb nationalists claimed as part of a Greater Serbia, each with its own Serb administration. In January 1992, following an exclusively Serb referendum within the six *Krajinas*, the Serb Democratic Party proclaimed the formation of a Serb republic within Bosnia-Herzegovina.^[47] The territory within today's Republika Srpska, which was internationally recognized in the 1995 Dayton Accords, includes a large portion of the land comprised by the six Serb *Krajinas* in 1991.

Croats. Montenegro's potential secession may also fuel a separatist movement on the other side of Bosnia-Herzegovina, dominated by Croats. However, Croat hardliners would likely bolster their specific argument that Bosnia-Herzegovina should remain sovereign but restructured into three equal entities for each of the country's primary ethnicities: Serb, Bosniak, and Croat. Since their March 2001 3rd entity movement^[48] was suppressed under international pressure, there have been few threatening calls for another 3rd entity uprising.

Following a successful Montenegrin independence referendum, the resurgence of calls for a 3rd entity among the hardline Croat community will depend on the extent to which they are supported by their ethnic counterparts in Croatia. Even during the 1992-1995 war, despite Croatian President Tudjman's efforts to carve out a chunk of Bosnia-Herzegovina to unite Croatian-occupied lands, few Croats from Croatia proper actually had territorial aspirations against Bosnia-Herzegovina. Many saw it as a buffer state separating them from Serbia and, economically, western Herzegovina offered them little gain. The ambition for a Croat mini-state, christened "Herzeg-Bosna," was instead led by a Herzegovina Croat, Mate Boban, who brought a more hard-line nationalist character to the Bosnian HDZ during the early stages of the war.^[49] Today, the HDZ has moderated and, given Zagreb's intensified efforts to join NATO and the EU, any activity among Bosnia-Herzegovina's 3rd entity supporters will have only limited support.

Bosniaks. Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks, who comprise the majority of Bosnia-Herzegovina's population, view Montenegro's potential independence as a threat to their own interests in holding the multi-ethnic country together. Bosniaks are concerned that Montenegro's secession would fuel separatism among the Bosnian Serbs and Croats in their own country, without whom Bosnia-Herzegovina could continue as a politically and economically viable state. In addition, realizing that a Serbia-Montenegro split would fuel Bosnian Serb separatist aspirations and may induce stronger relations between Belgrade and Banja Luka, senior Bosniak officials have already begun ensuring that there is a growing dialogue between the Bosnia-Herzegovina government and Serbia's. During a 15 March 2004 meeting in Sarajevo, Bosnian Presidency Chairman Sulejman Tihic (Bosniak) informed visiting Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Labus that special relations between Serbia and the RS needed to be expanded to include all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Borislav Paravac, the Bosnian Serb presidency member, was present. Tihic and Labus then made commitments to increase relations between the two countries and help each other with their European integration efforts.^[50] Overall, as Montenegro approaches potential independence, Tihic and his Bosniak counterparts will be the most vocal

within Bosnia-Herzegovina about retaining the status quo in order to move forward in the quest for EU and NATO membership.

Macedonia – Concern over New Ethnic Albanian Political Initiatives

At present, Macedonia has an official policy of “non interference” regarding Montenegro’s secession, and has therefore made no public statements about its preference on this issue. According to Macedonia’s Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington, Skopje is prepared to support either outcome, i.e., a continuation of the Serbia-Montenegro Union or two completely independent states.^[51] However, beyond its official policy, Skopje likely perceives Montenegro’s independence in one of two ways. As a republic, Macedonia was allowed to peacefully separate from Yugoslavia and therefore Montenegro should be allowed to do the same or, alternatively, an independent Montenegro may indirectly complicate Macedonia’s fragile, political-ethnic stability. The latter position is worth exploring, as Macedonia’s 2001 insurgency demonstrated the extent to which its stability can be vulnerable to regional developments.^[52]

The impact of an independent Montenegro on Macedonia’s stability can be explained in a few key points. First, the common denominator linking Macedonia and Montenegro is the ethnic Albanian presence in each. In both republics, ethnic Albanians comprise a key minority: seven percent in Montenegro and 25% in Macedonia.^[53] While Montenegrin Albanians have not supported an insurgency in their republic, they are peacefully seeking a degree of increased recognition and autonomy, not far different from the benefits Macedonian Albanians are currently seeking through the internationally-brokered 2001 Framework Peace Agreement’s required decentralization and local finance measures.^[54]

Second, Montenegrin Albanians have traditionally supported Djukanovic and his drive for Montenegro’s independence – a relationship which may lead to a new precedent for increased ethnic Albanian autonomy in Montenegro and other regions (outside of Kosovo). There are several historical benchmarks in the Djukanovic-ethnic Albanian relationship. Their alliance began in 1995 when Djukanovic supported Montenegrin legislation which exempted would-be conscripts from serving in the Yugoslav army, sparing many ethnic Albanians from the prospect of having to fight their kin in Kosovo. In addition, Djukanovic gained ethnic Albanian and other minorities’ support by providing a safehaven in Montenegro for refugees during the Bosnian and Kosovo conflicts.^[55] Throughout the beginning of Milosevic’s operations against Kosovar Albanians and continuing through NATO’s Kosovo campaign, Djukanovic took increasing measures to disassociate Montenegro from Belgrade – a move which undoubtedly placed Djukanovic and ethnic Albanians on the same side. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the Montenegrin populace’s equally-divided support for independence means that Djukanovic will need Montenegrin Albanians’ full support in an independence referendum. Montenegrin Albanians’ historical alliance with Djukanovic, their desire for enhanced autonomy,^[56] and Djukanovic’s need for their support during one of the most crucial points of his career strongly suggest he has promised them an unspecified increase in their autonomy within an independent Montenegro if they support his referendum.

What does this mean for Macedonia? Any type of increased autonomy for ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, particularly if the level of this autonomy surpasses that of Macedonian Albanians, will prompt a demand from the latter to increase their own status as a minority. Though Macedonian Albanians have been well-integrated into the government since the enactment of the 2001 Framework Peace Agreement, Skopje is already struggling with the ethnic Albanian autonomy issue. There are deadlocks within the ruling coalition, which includes ethnic Albanians, regarding the approval of a package of decentralization laws decreasing Macedonia’s municipalities from 123 to 80. This legislation would eventually facilitate more control for ethnic Albanians at a local level.^[57] If Montenegrin Albanians are given a higher degree of autonomy – such as a recognized regional or provincial status encompassing Montenegro’s ethnic Albanian-dominated south -- then there is a strong possibility that Macedonian Albanians will demand the same. Many Macedonian Slavs fear this could be a first step toward an eventual partitioning or secession of their country’s ethnic Albanian-dominated northwest.

Conclusion

Montenegro's independence appears inevitable, whether it occurs within 2005, 2006 or several years ahead. Unless the US, UN, EU and other international bodies agree on an updated policy that will clarify the way ahead for the Balkans, Montenegro's independence will be perceived by separatists as a new precedent for secession. This will set off a political chain reaction among nationalists in the region, challenging the international community's principle of multi-ethnic pluralism and border inviolability. An independent Montenegro will invigorate Kosovar Albanians' drive for independence and will fuel separatist aspirations in the RS, Bosnia's Croat region, and to a lesser extent in Serbia's Vojvodina region. The likelihood of increased ethnic Albanian autonomy in an independent Montenegro may set new expectations among pockets of ethnic Albanians elsewhere, including northwestern Macedonia. Beyond the Balkans, an international community-condoned secession by Montenegro risks boosting the cause of separatists in Moldova's Transdnister region,^[58] Georgia's Abkazia and South Ossetia regions, Spain's Basque region and Greece's Chamaria region.

To allay these implications, the US, UN, and EU need to recognize and articulate that the Balkans has now reached a new stage warranting a review of those few remaining territories which enjoyed a higher level of autonomy between World War II and the 1992-1995 Balkans war. This would narrow the review to Montenegro, Kosovo, and Vojvodina. It would also underscore the principle of border inviolability to the RS and Bosnian Croats, who never attained internationally recognized autonomy beyond their current status. Next, the international community should establish a common Balkans policy that accommodates Montenegro's secession without opening the door to a chain of other secessionist movements. This can be achieved by recognizing the peaceful, mutually consenting separation of one part of a state from another, using Czechoslovakia as an example. This aspect of the policy is already reinforced by the EU-brokered Belgrade Agreement, which allows Serbia and Montenegro to separate after three years. The review of Kosovo and Vojvodina should not be limited to restoring their former level of autonomy, but should instead determine the degree of autonomy necessary for their political-economic viability and the region's long-term stability. Finally, the policy should clearly stipulate that it applies only to the Balkans and sets no precedent for secessionist movements elsewhere. Failure to take preventive measures now may result in conflict and the need to send more forces into a wider region.

NOTES

^[1] By December 2004, NATO's SFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be replaced with an EU force, though NATO will establish a headquarters in Sarajevo and retain a reduced, US-led presence. As part of this transition, the US will reduce its presence by more than 50%.

^[2] "Roundup: Montenegrin Parties Divided on Tadic Remarks on Referendum," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 20 July 2004, <http://fbis.rccb.osis.gov> (21 July 2004).

^[3] Christopher Bennet, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 53.

^[4] *Ibid.*, 100.

^[5] "Serbia and Montenegro," *CIA World Factbook*, 2004, <http://www.cia.gov> (9 August 2004).

^[6] *Ibid.*

- [7] Dr. Jacob W. Kipp and Mr. Timothy L. Thomas, "International Ramifications of Yugoslavia's Serial Wars: the Challenge of Ethno-national Conflicts for a Post - Cold-War, European Order," *Foreign Military Studies Office*, 1994, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil> (24 September 2004).
- [8] Janusz Bugajski, "Facing the Future: The Balkans to the Year 2010," *Center for European Integration Studies*, April 1999, <http://www.zei.de> (24 September 2004).
- [9] Dr. Jacob W. Kipp and Mr. Timothy L. Thomas, "International Ramifications of Yugoslavia's Serial Wars: the Challenge of Ethno-national Conflicts for a Post - Cold-War, European Order," *Foreign Military Studies Office*, 1994, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil> (24 September 2004).
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- [13] "My Political Career is Tied with Project of Independence – Djukanovic," *Belgrade Tanjug*, transcribed with new title, "Montenegrin Prime Minister Says Political Career Tied to Independence 'Project'," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 18 July 2004, <http://fbis.rccb.osis.gov> (22 July 2004).
- [14] "Montenegrin Lawmakers Approve New Anthem, Flag," *Associated Press*, 13 July 2004, as posted in <http://www.haaretzdaily.com> (22 July 2004).
- [15] Nedeljko Rudovic, "Montenegro's Out-of-Step Opposition," transcribed with new title, "Montenegro: Opposition Fails to Capitalize on Government's Declining Popularity," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 8 July 2004, <http://fbis.rccb.osis.gov> (22 July 2004).
- [16] "News on Census 2003," *Njegos.org Civic Forum*, 24 December 2003, <http://www.njegos.org> (22 July 2004).
- [17] Sam Vaknin, "The Victory is Montenegro: The Implications of Independence for Montenegro," *Central Europe Review*, 30 April 2001, <http://www.ce-review.org> (23 July 2004).
- [18] Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1996), 29.
- [19] *Ibid.*, 21.
- [20] Bennet, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, 211-212.
- [21] "Serbia and Montenegro – Economy – Overview," *index Mundi*, 1 January 2004, <http://www.indexmundi.com> (26 September 2004).
- [22] "Economy – Privatization," *Republic of Montenegro*, <http://www.montenegro.yu> (25 September 2004).

- [23] "Serbia and Montenegro," *Investment Guide for Southeast Europe 2004*, <http://www.seeurope.net> (27 September 2004).
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- [29] Batic Bacevic, "Withdrawing the Lawsuit Against NATO," *Belgrade NIN*, translated with new title, "S-M's Draskovic Urges Facing Up to Ethnic Cleansing, Dropping NATO Lawsuit," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 22 July 2004, <http://fbis.rccb.osis.gov> (28 July 2004).
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[39] “Serbia and Montenegro: Country Report Stabilisation and Association Report 2004,” an EU Commission Staff Working Paper published by *Europa*, 30 March 2004, <http://europa.eu.int> (2 August 2004).

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[41] “EU’s Solana Says S-M Members Can Call Independence Referendum in 2006,” *Podgorica Dan*, translated by *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, 1 July 2004, <http://fbis.rccb.osis.gov> (3 August 2004).

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[47] *Ibid.*, 183-185.

[48] Nick Thorpe, “Croatian Soldiers Mutiny in Bosnia,” *The Guardian*, 29 March 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk> (3 August 2004). Note: The OHR specifically cracked down on the hard-line Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) which had orchestrated a short-lived mutiny.

[49] Bennet, *Yugoslavia’s Bloody Collapse*, 199-200.

[50] “Serbia-Montenegro Daily Survey,” Serbia-Montenegro Ministry of Foreign Affairs site published by *Serbian Unity Congress*, 16 March 2004, <http://news.suc.org> (4 August 2004).

[51] Personal telephone interview with Macedonia’s Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington, D.C., Slobodan Tasovski, on 4 August 2004.

[52] Kosovar Albanian extremists initiated the 2001 insurgency by exporting their fight from Kosovo to Macedonia and calling for increased autonomy within the country.

[53] “Macedonia’s Headcount Clarifies Ethnic Picture,” *Reuters*, 2 December 2003, <http://www.reuters.com> (4 August 2004).

[54] “Parliament Resumes Amendment Debate on Territorial Organization,” *Macedonian Information Agency*, 8 June 2004, <http://www.mia.com.mk> (4 August 2004).

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^[57] “Parliament Resumes Amendment Debate on Territorial Organization,” *Macedonian Information Agency*, 8 June 2004, <http://www.mia.com.mk> (4 August 2004).

^[58] For some of the latest developments in the Transdniester separatist republic, refer to the newslines section of *Radio Free Europe* at: <http://www.rferl.org>.